

APRIL 21, 1978

HOLOCAUST: A SURVIVOR'S REACTION  
(INSERTS IN TAPE LIBRARY)

ANNCR:

HOLOCAUST, A NINE-AND-A-HALF-HOUR VIDEODRAMA PORTRAYING THE NAZI EFFORT TO EXTERMINATE EUROPEAN JEWS DURING WORLD WAR TWO, HAS JUST ENDED ITS RUN ON AMERICAN TELEVISION. (ED. NOTE: WEDNESDAY, APRIL 19 WAS THE DATE OF THE LAST EPISODE.) AUDIENCE REACTION HAS BEEN VARIED, BUT ALMOST NOBODY SEEMS INDIFFERENT. ACTUAL SURVIVORS OF NAZI CONCENTRATION CAMPS ARE PERHAPS BEST QUALIFIED TO JUDGE THE TELEVISION SERIES, AND VOA'S DAVID BORGIDA TALKED WITH ARNOST LUSTIG, A CZECH WRITER AND FILM-MAKER WHO SURVIVED BOTH BUCHENWALD AND AUSCHWITZ, ABOUT HIS REACTIONS. HERE'S -----WITH A REPORT ON THAT CONVERSATION.

VOICE:

ARNOST LUSTIG IS AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF FILM AND LITERATURE AT AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN WASHINGTON. HE HAS WRITTEN SEVERAL BOOKS ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCES DURING THE HOLOCAUST. ALL OF THEM EMPHASIZE THE INCREDIBLE COURAGE AND KINDNESS HUMAN BEINGS CAN AND DO EXHIBIT UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES OF GREAT ADVERSITY. WHEN ASKED WHY HE STRESSES THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF AN EXPERIENCE AS HORRIBLE AS BEING INTERNED IN A CONCENTRATION CAMP, PROFESSOR LUSTIG REPLIES:

TAPE: CUT ONE -- LUSTIG

"LIFE ITSELF IS POSITIVE. LIFE IS A PRIVILEGE WHICH WAS GIVEN TO US ONLY FOR A LIMITED PERIOD OF TIME. YOU HAVE IT ONLY ONCE AND YOU CANNOT REPEAT IT. THIS IS ALL WE KNOW. AND WE ARE AMONG PEOPLE -- THIS IS ALSO WHAT WE KNOW -- BUT PEOPLE CAN BE EXTREMELY BAD AND THEY

CAN BE EXTREMELY GOOD. MANY THINGS DO DEPEND ON CONDITIONS. BUT EVEN IF CONDITIONS ARE TERRIBLE, EVEN WHEN PEOPLE ARE UNDER TERRIBLE EXTREME PRESSURE, THEY CAN BE BEAUTIFUL, AND I EXPERIENCED IT."

VOICE:

ONE OF THE INCIDENTS ARNOST LUSTIG REMEMBERS MOST VIVIDLY IS THE TIME A FRIEND SAVED HIS LIFE WHEN A NAZI OFFICER WAS ABOUT TO SHOOT HIM FOR STEALING A PIECE OF BREAD. THE FRIEND JUMPED BETWEEN THE PISTOL AND LUSTIG IN ORDER TO DIE WITH HIM, AND THE GERMAN OFFICER, STARTLED, SIMPLY CURSED AND LEFT. AS A BOY, LUSTIG ALSO WATCHED HIS MOTHER MARCHING NAKED THROUGH THE MUD ON HER WAY TO AN UNKNOWN FATE; WHEN HE SHIVERED WITH THE COLD, A GROUP OF OLDER PRISONERS SURROUNDED HIM TO WARM HIM WITH THEIR BODIES. WATCHING HOLOCAUST ON TELEVISION WAS A MIXED EXPERIENCE FOR LUSTIG, BECAUSE HE REMEMBERS THE CAMPS AS MUCH WORSE THAN THEY APPEAR IN THE SERIES. BUT HE REFUSES TO CRITICIZE THE SHOW BECAUSE IN SPITE OF ITS FAULTS IT ACQUAINTS A WHOLE NEW GENERATION OF AMERICANS WITH A CATASTROPHE WHICH SOME OF THEIR PARENTS EXPERIENCED FIRSTHAND:

TAPE: CUT TWO -- LUSTIG

"I MET A MAN WHO WAS THE FIRST MAN WHO OPENED THE GATES OF DACHAU, AND I MET MANY PEOPLE WHO WERE IN BUCHENWALD, AND THEY COULD NEVER FORGET WHAT THEY SAW. BUT THOSE PEOPLE ARE TODAY FATHERS OF THE COMING AMERICAN GENERATION, THIS YOUNG AMERICAN GENERATION WHO WILL RUN THE UNITED STATES IN THE NEXT TWENTY, THIRTY YEARS. THEY DIDN'T KNOW AS MUCH."

VOICE:

LUSTIG DOES NOT CONSIDER HOLOCAUST AN EXAMPLE OF GREAT ART, MAINLY BECAUSE IT DID NOT PORTRAY THE FULL HORROR OF THE NAZI DEATH CAMPS. BUT HE SAYS THAT THE

FACT THAT IT WAS BROADCAST ON PRIME-TIME COMMERCIAL TELEVISION TO AN AUDIENCE OF SOME FIFTY MILLION AMERICANS GAVE IT UNPRECEDENTED IMPACT:

TAPE: CUT THREE -- LUSTIG

"THE MORAL IMPACT OF THIS SHOW IS ABSOLUTELY FIRST-CLASS, IMPORTANT BEYOND OUR EXPECTATIONS. FIFTY MILLION AMERICANS ARE WATCHING THE TV SHOW, AND NEXT FIFTY MILLION (WILL DISCUSS) IT, WHAT REALLY HAPPENED AND WHAT IS THE IMPACT FOR TODAY? WHAT THEY ARE DISCUSSING IS, IF IT HAPPENED 33 YEARS AGO, IS IT POSSIBLE THAT IT WILL HAPPEN TOMORROW AGAIN? AND IF IT HAPPENED TO THE JEWS, WILL IT HAPPEN TO THE JEWS AGAIN, OR IS IT POSSIBLE THAT IT WILL HAPPEN TO ANOTHER GROUP?"

VOICE:

ONE QUESTION THAT HAS OCCURRED TO MANY PEOPLE WHO HAVE WATCHED HOLOCAUST IS, WHY NOW? WHY HAS IT TAKEN THIRTY-THREE YEARS FOR THE JEWISH CATASTROPHE TO BE SHOWN ON PRIME-TIME TELEVISION IN THE UNITED STATES, AND FOR THE HOLOCAUST TO BECOME A TOPIC OF GENERAL CONVERSATION AMONG THE AMERICAN PEOPLE? PROFESSOR LUSTIG SAYS THAT IT'S A MATTER OF HISTORICAL DISTANCE: A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF TIME HAD TO ELAPSE BEFORE PEOPLE REALIZED JUST HOW IMPORTANT THE HOLOCAUST WAS. HE COMPARES THE EVENT TO MOUNT EVEREST, WHICH HE SAYS LOOKED DISAPPOINTINGLY SMALL WHEN HE VIEWED IT FROM A NEARBY MOUNTAIN SIDE, BUT ENORMOUS WHEN SEEN FROM A DISTANCE.

TAPE : CUT FOUR -- LUSTIG

"AND SO IT IS WITH THE HOLOCAUST. WE NEEDED A HISTORICAL DISTANCE. WE HAVE TO TAKE THIS DISTANCE TO SEE HOW BIG IT IS, AND NOW WE DO SEE THAT IT'S NOT ONLY BIG, THAT IT'S ALSO DEEP, AND THAT IT'S NOT ONLY A JEWISH CASE, BECAUSE IT WOULDN'T BE ENOUGH, YOU KNOW; IT'S A UNIVERSAL CASE OF THE HUMAN FAMILY."

VOICE:

WHAT WILL THE LONG-RANGE IMPACT OF HOLOCAUST BE?  
PROFESSOR LUSTIG SAYS HE SEES IT MAINLY AS THE CATALYST  
FOR FURTHER RESEARCH INTO THE NEAR-EXTERMINATION OF  
EUROPEAN JEWS DURING WORLD WAR TWO, TO DISCOVER HOW AND  
WHY IT HAPPENED AND TO PREVENT IT, IF POSSIBLE, FROM EVER  
HAPPENING AGAIN.

TAPE: CUT FIVE -- LUSTIG

"AMERICA IS THE COUNTRY WHERE ALL (THE) IMPORTANT  
BOOKS ON HOLOCAUST ARE BEING PUBLISHED, GRADUALLY IN (THE)  
LAST THIRTY YEARS. THERE IS NO IMPORTANT BOOK, NO  
IMPORTANT FILM, WHICH WOULDN'T BE SHOWN, OR BOOK WHICH  
WOULDN'T BE PUBLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES. THERE IS  
NO RESEARCH NOT AVAILABLE TO AMERICAN SCHOLARS. SO WE  
DIDN'T HAVE TO WAIT FOR THIS BIG EVENT OF NBC, (TELEVISION  
NETWORK) BUT WE ARE VERY GRATEFUL, BECAUSE THROUGH THE  
GATE OF THIS NBC WHICH CAN BE CRITICIZED FROM (A) THOUSAND  
POINTS OF VIEW, THE SERIOUS WORK, SERIOUS ART, HAS IT  
SECOND CHANCE."

VOICE:

PROFESSOR ARNOST LUSTIG, A CZECH-BORN WRITER AND  
FILM-MAKER WHO VIEWED THE RECENT TELEVISION SERIES  
HOLOCAUST FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF A CONCENTRATION-CAMP  
SURVIVOR.

-0-

RK/PY